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Message Text

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ACTION EA-13

INFO OCT-01 SS-14 ISO-00 NSC-10 NSCE-00 PM-03 L-02 PRS-01

CIAE-00 INR-10 NSAE-00 RSC-01 DODE-00 OMB-01 DRC-01

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C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 16622

LIMDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS : PINS, TH
SUBJECT : VIEWS OF KRIS SIVARA

SUMMARY: THE DCM OCTOBER 22 GAVE A SMALL STAG DINNER, ATTENDED BY THE AMBASSADOR AND THE POLITICAL COUNSELOR, FOR GENERAL KRIS SIVARA AND TWO OF HIS PRINCIPAL ARMY SUBORDINATES (DEPUTY CHIEF OF STAFF LT. GEN. SERM NANAKORN AND ASSISTANT CHIEF OF STAFF FOR PERSONNEL LT. GEN. PORN DHAHABHUMI). KRIS HAS EMERGED FROM THE RECENT STUDENT DEMONSTRATIONS AND CHANGE OF GOVERNMENT AS THE LEADING MILITARY FIGURE IN THAILAND. HE DISCUSSED THE DEMONSTRATIONS, COMTEMPLATED CHANGES IN THE FORM OF THE MILITARY HIERARCHY, THE MILITARY PROFILE, THE PROJECTED CONSTITUTION, AND UPCOMING ELECTIONS. END SUMMARY.

1. STUDENT DEMONSTRATIONS: KRIS SAID THERE HAD BEEN NO COMMUNIST INFLUENCE TO ANY SIGNIFICANT DEGREE IN THE DEMONSTRATIONS. HE DID NOT DISCOUNT THE PARTICIPATION OF INDIVIDUAL COMMUNIST AGITATORS, HOWEVER, AND SPECIFICALLY CITED A GIRL FROM SAKON NAKHON, ABOUT 20 YEARS OLD, WHO HAD BEEN PICKED UP AND WHOM HE HAD INTERVIEWED OCTOBER 14. THIS GIRL, WHO CLAIMED TO BE A STUDENT BUT WAS PROVED CONFIDENTIAL

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AFTER QUESTIONING TO BE LYING, STRUCK HIM AS A HARDCORE COMMUNIST INDOCTRINEE WHO PROBABLY HAD CONTACTS WITH NORTH VIETNAMESE CADRE. SHE WAS RELEASED BY THE MILITARY, WHICH FEARED THAT DETAINING HER MIGHT PROVOKE FURTHER

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STUDENT DEMONSTRATIONS. KRIS SAID THAT ONE OF THE REASONS
FOR THE FRACAS THAT ERUPTED BETWEEN POLICE AND
STUDENTS EARLY ON THE MORNING OF OCTOBER 14 NEAR THE
DUSIT PALACE WAS FEAR FOR THE KING'S SAFETY SINCE SOME
OF THE STUDENTS HAD BEEN DISRESPECTFUL TOWARD HIS MAJESTY.
KRIS WAS PARTICULARLY CRITICAL OF SEKSAN PRASERTKUL WHO,
ACCORDING TO KRIS, HAD REFUSED TO ACCEPT A THAMMASAT
DIPLOMA FROM THE KING IN JUNE 1973, AND HAD IGNORED
THE KING'S INVITATION TO GO TO THE PALACE DURING THE
DEMONSTRATIONS.

2. COMMENT: WE HAVE NO INDICATION THAT SEKSAN WOULD
HAVE BEEN GRADUATED IN JUNE, AND HAVE BEEN TOLD BY THE ACTING
RECTOR THAT HE IS STILL ENROLLED AS A FOURTH YEAR POLITICAL
SCIENCE STUDENT AT THAMMASAT.ADDITIONALLY, THE LOCAL PRESS HAS
REPORTED THAT SEKSAN HAD A ONE-HOUR AUDIENCE WITH THE
KING ON OCTOBER 22. KRIS' COMMENTS ON SEKSAN ARE
TYPICAL OF RUMORS AND APPARENTLY ERRONEOUS REPORTS NOW
CIRCULATING IN BANGKOK, INCLUDING IN HIGH PLACES.

3. MILITARY HIERARCHY: KRIS SAID THAT AT THE OCTOBER 22
CABINET MEETING HE INFORMED THE PRIME MINISTER THAT THERE
SHOULD BE NO MORE FIELD MARSHALS AND NO SUPREME COMMAND
SINCE THE KING IS THE ONLY SUPREME COMMANDER. HE
CITED THE FATE OF PREVIOUS FIELD MARSHALS PIBULSONGGRAM,
SARIT, THANOM, AND PRAPHAT AND IMPLIED THAT THE EXILE
OF THREE AND THE POST-MORTEM SCANDALS OF THE FOURTH IN-
DICATED THE TITLE WAS UNLUCKY.KRIS SAID THAT THAILAND
WAS CONSIDERING EUROPEAN MODELS AS WELL AS THE AMERICAN
JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF (JCS) SYSTEM IN DECIDING ON THE
TOP MILITARY COMMAND STRUCTURE. THE AMBASSADOR OFFERED
TO SEND HIM MATERIAL ON THE JCS ORGANPBATION, RECOGNIZING
THAT KRIS WOULD ADAPT THEM TO "THE THAI WAY". KRIS
ACKNOWLEDGED THAT HE WOULD LIKE TO RECEIVE THE MATERIALS,
BUT WOULD NOT BLINDLY COPY ANY EXISTING SYSTEM. HE
MENTIONED THAT GENERAL SURAKIJ'S STATUS WOULD NOT CHANGE.
HE WOULD IN EFFECT BE THE CHIEF OF STAFF TO THE CHAIRMAN
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OF THE COMMANDERS OF THE THREE SERVICES (I.E. LIKE CHAIRMAN OF
THE JCS). KRIS SAID THAT SURAKIJ WOULD PLAY A STRONGER ROLE
IN THE COMMUNIST SUPPRESSION OPERATIONS COMMAND (CSOC) THAN
BEFORE. KRIS DID NOT CHALLENGE OUR ASSUMPTION THAT HE, KRIS,
WOULD BE CHAIRMAN IN AN ARRANGEMENT SUCH AS IS MENTIONED ABOVE.

4. COMMENT: KRIS DID NOT INDICATE WHAT THE RELATIONSHIP
OF THIS JCS ARRANGEMENT WOULD BE TO THE MINISTER OF
DEFENSE, AIR CHIEF MARSHAL DAWEE CHULLASAP, AND WE WOULD
NOT BE SURPRISED TO SEE THIS LEFT FUZZY. HOWEVER, DAWEE
AND KRIS ARE GOOD FRIENDS AND CAN PROBABLY WORK THINGS OUT.
ONE OF THE MORE HIGHLY RESPECTED THAI JOURNALISTS
REPORTED IN THE OCTOBER 21 "BANGKOK POST" THE FOLLOWING

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PARAGRAPH WHICH CONFIRMS WHAT KRIS SAID HE TOLD THE CABINET:
"GENERAL KRIS SIVARA, ARMY COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF, HAS
DECLINED THE APPOINTMENT AS SUPREME COMMANDER OF THE
ARMED FORCES AND A PROMOTION TO FIELD MARSHAL. HE WILL
ALSO DECLINE APPOINTMENT TO THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY. HE HAD
PREVIOUSLY REFUSED TO TAKE A CABINET POST (MINISTER
OF DEFENSE) OFFERED HIM."

5. MILITARY PROFILE: KRIS BROUGHT UP THE CHULALONGKORN
CEREMONIES SCHEDULED FOR THE FOLLOWING DAY. HE SAID,
CONTRARY TO THE CUSTOM OF PAST YEARS, THAT HE WAS KEEPING
TROOPS AWAY FROM THE EQUESTRIAN STATUE OF CHULALONGKORN
NEAR THE NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY. HE WAS FEARFUL THAT
COMMUNIST INFILTREES FROM UPCOUNTRY OR OTHER AGITATORS MIGHT
INCITE TO ACTION THE MASSES OF PEOPLE WHO COME TO THE STATUE TO
PAY THEIR RESPECTS. HE SAID THAT THE POPULACE WAS STILL
RESENTFUL OF POLICE AND MILITARY ACTIONS DURING
THE STUDENT DEMONSTRATIONS.

6. COMMENT: KRIS HAS DEMONSTRATED CONSIDERABLE POLITICAL
SENSITIVITY IN REDUCING THE MILITARY PROFILE DURING
THIS IMPORTANT THAI HOLIDAY. HIS ACTION ILLUSTRATES THAT
HE INTENDS TO SEE THAT THE ARMY HOLDS TO ITS NEW LOWERED
PROFILE.

7. THE CONSTITUTION AND NATIONAL ELECTIONS: KRIS SAID THAT
THE GOVERNMENT HOPES TO SPEED UP THE TIMETABLE AND
TO COMPLETE THE CONSTITUTION AS WELL AS THE ELECTIONS IN
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SIX MONTHS. HE SAID THAT THE NUMBER OF PARTIES SHOULD
BE RESTRICTED, AND THAT DEFINITE QUALIFICATIONS SHOULD BE
ESTABLISHED FOR THE CANDIDATES WHO RUN FOR THE ASSEMBLY.
THE AMBASSADOR OFFERED TO SEEK AMERICAN HELP IN ADVISISNG
THE THAI ON POLITICAL PARTY FORMATION SHOULD THE THAI SO
DESIRE.

8. COMMENT: OTHER SOURCES REPORT THAT THE CONSTITUTION
WILL BE DRAFTED IN THREE MONTHS AND THAT ANOTHER THREE
MONTHS WILL BE REQUIRED TO OBTAIN APPROVAL BY THE PRESENT
PARLIAMENT. ELECTIONS WOULDFOLLOW THREE MONTHS LATER.
KRIS, WHO SELECTED THE TWO OTHER MILITARY GUESTS WHO ACCOMPANIED
HIM TO THE DINNER, WAS SOMEWHAT HESITANT AT THE START
OF THE EVENING, BUT SUBSEQUENTLY BECAME MORE RELAXED AND FRANK.
THROUGHOUT THE DISCUSSION HE STRESSED HIS ALLEGIANCE TO THE KING
AND HIS SUPPORT FOR THE SANYA GOVERNMENT. OUR DISCUSSION WITH
KRIS SHOWED THAT HE HAD A GOOD UNDERSTANDING OF THE CURRENT
SITUATION IN THAILAND (THOUGH HIS KNOWLEDGE OF CERTAIN DETAILS
WAS FAULTY) AND OF THE NEED FOR CAREFUL STEPS TO REBUILD
ARMY MORALE AND THE ARMY'S RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE PEOPLE.WE
BELIEVE KRIS' INSTINCTS ARE RIGHT AND THAT HE WILL DO WHAT
HE CAN; THE MAJOR UNANSWERED QUESTION IS THE EXTENT TO

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WHICH, OVER TIME, HE MAY FEEL FORCED TO BOW TO PRESSURES
FROM WITHIN THE ARMY.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: Z
Capture Date: 11 MAY 1999
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: POLITICAL STABILITY, GOVERNMENT OVERTHROW, MILITARY PERSONNEL, GOVERNMENT REFORM, STUDENT DEMONSTRATIONS, SOCIAL RECEPTIONS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 25 OCT 1973
Decaption Date: 28 MAY 2004
Decaption Note: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: morefirh
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1973BANGKO16622
Document Source: ADS
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: 11652 GDS
Errors: n/a
Film Number: n/a
From: BANGKOK
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1973/newtext/t19731065/abqcefmf.tel
Line Count: 168
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE
Office: ACTION EA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: LIMDIS
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 4
Previous Channel Indicators:
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: LIMDIS
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: morefirh
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 05 DEC 2001
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <05-Dec-2001 by smithrj>; APPROVED <06 MAR 2002 by morefirh>
Review Markings:

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US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
30 JUN 2005

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: SUBJECT : VIEWS OF KRIS SIVARA
TAGS: PINS, TH, (KRIS SIVARA)
To: STATE
CINCPAC HAWAII
Type: TE
Markings: Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 30 JUN 2005

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